

APARTMENT LIFE: Smart Ideas for Small Spaces

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Easy Modern



In lieu of the spiral stairs ("before," below), a straight staircase is tucked behind new kitchen closets, constructed from solid cherry frames and rice paper panels; aircraft cables with exposed turnbuckles replaced a traditional railing on the mezzanine. Bottom: Architect Andrew Wilkinson and homeowner Jean Mone



Smart and Small

A DIMINUTIVE COOKIE-CUTTER DUPLEX IN GREENWICH VILLAGE GETS A LARGER AND SMARTER LEASE ON LIFE. **BY LINDA O'KEEFFE**

When Woody Allen quipped "I don't want to live on in my work, I want to live on in my apartment," he no doubt had a suite of rooms in mind. After all, on the universal real estate wish list, space ranks as No. 1.

No. 2 on the list is natural light, for the sense of well-being it promotes and because it visually expands even the tiniest of spaces. So when Jean Mone complains about too much light invading her 634-square-foot Village penthouse near NYU, it's with a sense of irony. "I thought about putting an automatic

blackout screen on the skylight," she says. "Sometimes it's so bright in here I could wear sunglasses!"

The skylight, recessed centrally into the living room's 17-foot-high ceiling, may be the only detail that survived the gut renovation she undertook with architect Andrew Wilkinson. "We first met to discuss updating her kitchen," he recalls. "Then I suggested removing the spiral staircase, and Jean loved the idea, so before long it went from a minor to a gut renovation." Mone, a psychotherapist and the founder of a green shopping



website (BigGreenCart.com), was immediately game because the original staircase occupied the apartment's core and made the visual and physical transition between the hallway, kitchen and living spaces awkward. Although she's not a cook, she was also keen to expand the kitchen footprint with a much-needed wall of storage.

Removing the helical staircase freed up the central axis of the first floor and created a sight line through the 362-square-foot space from the entry door to the Juliet balcony on the east-facing wall. Wilkinson's choice to install the wall of four identical doors accentuated the sense of procession through the rooms, as did his choice to use one type of flooring throughout. Local contractors had warned him of a characteristic structural tapering of the floor in this postwar building, so he corrected the pitch, reinforced the subfloor and paved it over with randomly sized stone tiles that are similar to outdoor flagstone flooring Mone had admired while on vacation in Europe. "I was budget-conscious about certain things," says Mone (whose name is pronounced à la the painter Claude Monet), "but I

In the living room, above, dining chairs fold away, the Ligne Roset table lowers to coffee-table height, and the banquette doubles as a guest bed. Right: The stairs lead to the 272-square-foot mezzanine, where the bed, bathroom and walk-in closet are located.

splurged on the tiles because I felt they would pull everything together. Plus they are unexpected and extremely low-maintenance."

"The biggest mistake I see in small spaces is overarticulating," says Wilkinson. "When there's not much room, the design needs to be quiet and calm. That's why I restrict my material choices." All the walls are coated with Safecoat's white low-VOC paint, and cherry wood faces everything from the kitchen appliances to the sleep-mezzanine hand rail. And, as if addressing the No. 3 bullet on the

real estate wish list, Wilkinson built storage into every piece of millwork, so Mone's library sits neatly stacked under the living room's built-in sofa, while the bank of drawers forming the half wall between the living room and the kitchen contain project files.

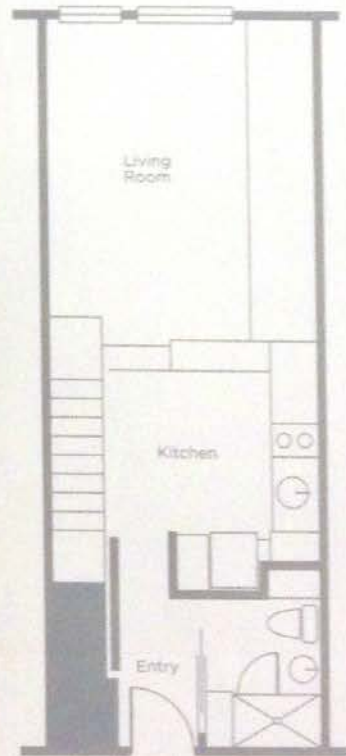
The kitchen, which Mone admits is rarely used to cook anything more than water, still needs to function well and look handsome. Wilkinson customized a Northland refrigerator by facing it with cherry and installed a Miele dishwasher and Gaggenau oven and cooktop. The new abundance of storage made above-counter cabinets unnecessary (Wilkinson knew they would inhibit the kitchen's airiness).

The savvy architect introduced light into areas that weren't blessed with it naturally: a clerestory window above the microwave in the kitchen/bathroom wall; a strip of incandescent "runway" lights under a sheet of Plexiglas in the front hallway floor. He drywalled up into the mezzanine's floor joists and installed four ceiling fixtures that lord over the

kitchen wearing customized pillbox shades.


When the window is open, sounds from the street waft into the apartment, and on stormy nights Mone is serenaded to sleep by the sounds of nature. "I might curse it on sunny days, but I unequivocally love the skylight on rainy nights," she says. ☼

Reflections in the polished granite countertops and backsplashes add a sense of depth to the kitchen (below). Appliances include a Northland refrigerator, a Miele dishwasher and a Gaggenau oven and cooktop. The downstairs bathroom (right) has mosaic tiles from Home Depot Expo; a Kohler vessel sink sits on a Crate & Barrel table.



MORE SMALL-SPACE SOLUTIONS

from architect Andrew Wilkinson



1 Closets deeper than 24 inches are prime candidates for **"double duty"** storage. For a 36-inch-deep closet, use the front part for hanging and the back 12 inches for an **adjustable shelf system** for seasonal storage or shoes. Access the shelves by pushing aside hanging clothes.

2 Think horizontal. Keeping cabinets **below counter height** in small spaces helps promote the perception of a larger space. **Avoid floor-to-ceiling** cabinets. They reduce the ceiling surface area and give the room a smaller appearance.

3 Instead of separating areas with walls—which are about 4 inches thick—consider **separating the spaces with cabinets** about 13 inches deep. The additional 9-inch thickness can usually be **split between the rooms** with little consequence, and the volume of storage gained is quite substantial.